

Intelligence Officer Replies to Charges

Army Denies Torture Is Taught

12/13/69

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BALTIMORE, Dec. 12—The My Lai backlash put another American military operation in South Vietnam on public trial here today in strange surroundings.

Col. Marshall L. Farewell, commandant, opened the tightly guarded doors of his U.S. Army Intelligence School here at Fort Holabird to deny to newsmen that torture is part of the curriculum.

He was responding to charges of one of his former students, Lt. Francis T. Reitemeyer, that Holabird instructors had said assassination and torture were part of the Project Phoenix operation in Vietnam.

Clandestine Effort

Phoenix, according to the scant Army description of the clandestine effort, is an American advisory program in intelligence for the South Vietnamese.

Reitemeyer, in part of a successful court suit to get out of the Army on conscientious objector grounds, said he had been told at Holabird that he might be required "to maintain a kill quota of 50 bodies a month" as a Phoenix operative.

Fallwell branded this and other charges by the lieutenant, now out of the Army, as "wild allegations." The commandant said he had invited the press to hear the school's side of the story in hopes "of bringing some reason" into the public discussion of the charges.

The document at issue is called a "proffer" and was filed Feb. 14 in District Court here as part of a suit seeking discharge from the Army. The proffer was reported briefly in the press shortly after it was filed. But the My Lai incident has prompted the wire services

and newspapers to go back to the proffer to quote it in more detail.

William H. Zinman of Baltimore, Reitemeyer's attorney, wrote five senators urging them to study the proffer in light of the alleged massacre of civilians at My Lai.

The Army has a sworn statement dated Dec. 6, 1968, in which Reitemeyer states he was not taught to be an assassin at Holabird. Army sources said they obtained the sworn statement after hearing that Reitemeyer had told a girl friend about assassination instruction.

Jerry W. Friedheim, a Pentagon spokesman, quoted from the sworn statement yesterday. He said Reitemeyer had stated: "I am not being trained in any political assassination . . . I never told (her) that I was being trained to be an assassin, nor that I was to be in charge of a group of assassins."

The proffer is not sworn testimony by Reitemeyer. It is Zinman's statement on what Reitemeyer had told him about the courses at Holabird. Here are excerpts from that proffer:

• "The Phoenix program was described to him as a policy of the United States Government which sought the elimination and destruction of the Communist infrastructure in South Vietnam.

• "Your petitioner was further informed at this Intelligence School that he was authorized to adopt any technique or employ any means through his mercenaries which was calculated to find and ferret out the Vietcong or the Vietcong sympathizers.

• A "field technique designed to glean information from a captured Vietcong

soldier who was wounded and bleeding was to promise medical assistance only after the soldier disclosed the information sought by the interrogators."

In one incident, the proffer alleges, "the interrogation had terminated and the mercenaries and advisers were satisfied that no further information could be obtained from the prisoner, he was left to die in the middle of the village, still bleeding and without any medical attention whatsoever."

Zinman submitted those and other allegations in an attempt to show why Reitemeyer had become revolted by Army service after he had enlisted on Jan. 24, 1967.

Studies for Priesthood

Reitemeyer, 24, of Clark, N.J., had been studying for the priesthood at Immaculate Conception Seminary in Darlington, N.J., when he joined the Army. He had received his degree earlier from Seton Hall University in classical languages and philosophy.

One objection Army officers raised to Reitemeyer's request that he be discharged as a conscientious objector was that he did not try to get out of the service until he learned he was going to be sent to Vietnam.

Fallwell said yesterday that he played no part in the Army deliberations on whether to appeal the court ruling ordering Reitemeyer's discharge. The Army decided against it after first filing an objection.

But the school commandant made no secret of his belief that Reitemeyer

should not command troops: "A reluctant warrior is bad enough but a reluctant leader is worse than useless," Fallwell said.

The Holabird school graduates 9,000 Army men a year, Fallwell said, with only a small percentage of them ending up in the Phoenix program.

As far as interrogation techniques taught in the six-week course Reitemeyer complained about, the commandant said:

"Torture is avoided like poison . . . One of the most priceless commodities you can have is a prisoner . . . Our people are taught that they will stick strictly by the Geneva Convention when questioning prisoners. If they see anything in violation of those rules, 'they are told to stop it. If it is not within their power to stop it, they are told to protest and report' the violation.

Continual Questioning

Capt. Allan P. Robb, an instructor at the school and formerly an intelligence officer for the 9th Division headquarters at Dong Tam, South Vietnam, told newsmen that continual questioning—not torture—is the effective way to obtain reliable information from prisoners.

Asked why torture would not be effective in an emergency, Robb said that besides being illegal and immoral, information obtained that way is unreliable and dries up other sources of intelligence within the native population.